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DE RUEHCL #0086/01 1211702  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 301702Z APR 08  
FM AMCONSUL CASABLANCA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8050  
INFO RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS 2983  
RUEHBP/AMEMBASSY BAMAKO 0275  
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 0876  
RUEHRY/AMEMBASSY CONAKRY 0036  
RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 0295  
RUEHLC/AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE 0054  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0369  
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 3802  
RUEHNK/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT 2344  
RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT 8296  
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS 2103  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0649  
RUEHYD/AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE 0094

C O N F I D E N T I A L CASABLANCA 000086

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STATE FOR NEA/MAG AND NEA/PI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/30/2018

TAGS: [ECON](#) [ELAB](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [MO](#)

SUBJECT: CASABLANCA FIRE MAKES SAFETY STANDARDS A BURNING ISSUE

Classified By: Principal Officer Douglas Greene for reasons 1.4 (B)  
AND (D)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On April 26, fire erupted in a mattress factory in Casablanca, killing 58 of the 100 workers trapped inside. While the factory owner violated numerous safety regulations and will be prosecuted for his role in the tragedy, citizens also blame government authorities for failing to enforce norms and standards. Inexperience, poor equipment, and inadequate infrastructure hindered the ability of fire and security forces to respond to the blaze, increasing fatalities and public outrage. Proactively responding to the event, the king formed a regulatory commission to propose new safety measures. Citizens are appalled by the tragedy, adding to discontent over the high cost of living and the lack of firm government action on that front. End Summary.

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FIRE AT MATTRESS FACTORY KILLS 58  
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¶2. (U) On the morning of April 26, fire broke out in the Rosamor mattress factory in the Hay Hassani neighborhood of Casablanca, killing 58 and injuring 17. Authorities are still investigating the cause, but recent reports suggest a discarded cigarette butt may have sparked the blaze. Flammable materials at the factory caused the fire to spread quickly, endangering over 100 employees who were at work when the fire started.

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WHO'S TO BLAME? THE OWNER  
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¶3. (U) On April 29, Casablanca's General Prosecutor charged factory owner Adil Moufarreh and his son, the manager, with failure to provide safety equipment, involuntary manslaughter, and failure to render assistance, among other offenses. In a statement released the same day, Minister of Interior Chakib Benmoussa revealed that the owner had made unauthorized modifications to his property, violating safety standards. In addition, he installed grills on the windows, locked employees in during work hours, and stored flammable materials in hallways and stairwells, endangering workers.

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## WHO'S TO BLAME? THE AUTHORITIES

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14. (SBU) While Casablancans hold the owner and his son accountable for the Rosamor tragedy, they also blame government regulators for failing to enforce safety measures. In some cases, officials simply turn a blind eye or do not follow up. Knowing this, owners wait until after they have "passed" inspection to go ahead with unauthorized plans. In other cases, corrupt authorities accept bribes to forego inspection or sign off on unlawful practices. In addition, there are simply not enough inspectors. According to a medical labor inspector in Casablanca, there are only five for the entire city, and one has been on leave for the past year. In light of the recent fire, many believe that the authorities responsible for enforcing safety standards should be judged for failing to carry out their duties.

15. (U) If people are angry that neither the owner nor regulators saw fit to insist on safety precautions, they are equally appalled at authorities' response to the fire. Witnesses contend that firefighters arrived two hours after the blaze began and had trouble finding a water source. Low water pressure and worn hoses prevented water from reaching the flames. One witness felt a glimmer of hope when a ladder truck arrived, but his heart sank when no one knew how to operate it. Construction workers who rescued several employees by breaking through a wall provided more assistance than fire and security forces.

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## OFFICIAL REACTION

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16. (U) The palace realizes that the fall-out from the Rosamor tragedy is big. The media has featured prominent coverage of the response of the king, who interrupted his trip to Meknes to hold a meeting on the

matter. Keenly aware of public reaction, he dispatched Benmoussa to the scene immediately to offer support to victims and their families.

In addition, he created an interministerial commission, led by Ahmed Chami, Minister of Industry, Commerce and New Technology, to propose regulatory measures that enforce safety standards in the industrial and service sectors. The commission's recommendations are due by the end of the year. As further evidence of the king's proactive strategy to contain public ire, residents of Hay Hassani report a flurry of painting and clean-up around the factory - tell-tale signs that a royal visit is expected.

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## PUBLIC REACTION

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17. (SBU) The deplorable conditions at the Rosamor factory are not an anomaly. Residents of Casablanca agree that thousands of similar factories exist in cities around Morocco. A mere two days after the Rosamor tragedy, three people died in a fire at a Casablanca rug factory, proving their point. People are all the more horrified by the tragedy that has occurred because they know how easily it can happen.

18. (SBU) Four days after the fire, people still gather at the site. Families of victims grieve and demand assistance, officials continue to search for bodies, and others observe the wreckage. A Consulate employee who lives near the burned building recorded footage of vocal crowds demanding government action. Several Consulate employees commented that the state's two main television stations broadcasted music and entertainment following the fire rather than covering it. Incredulous, they hope this is not an indication that the fire and its implications will be swept under the rug.

19. (C) Comment: The Rosamor fire comes at a particularly tense time in Casablanca. The rising cost of living has people feeling strapped, and the on-going social dialogue between the government and labor unions has yet to yield a concrete plan for raising wages and lowering taxes. Set against this backdrop, the deadly fires in Casablanca underscore the dreadful - and dangerous - working conditions that contribute to discontent, as well as the urgent need for the government to take swift action to enforce standards. On the eve of Labor Day, with large demonstrations expected (septel), the

tragic loss of workers' lives is yet another reason to protest the status quo. End Comment.

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